SOME NOTABLE PERSONS WHO HAVE DISAPPEARED AT SEA

Disappearance at sea such as that of F. Kent Loomis, brother of the assistant secretary of state at Washington, are fortunately rare, which is on the whole a matter for surprise. The ocean liners are nowadays so immense and so densely crowded with human freight that it is difficult, nay, almost impossible, for the officers of the vessel to maintain any efficient supervision and control of the passengers on board, and in view of the number of "crooks," card sharps and desperate criminals of international infamy who are constantly traveling between New York and the Old World, it is remarkable that there should not be more of these disappearances at sea, since the temptation to these men to take advantage of heavy drinking or of mere debility resulting from seasickness to rifle a passenger's pockets and then to drop the victim overboard during a lurch of the ship, under the cover of darkness, concealed by the shadow of some deckhouse, must be at times almost irresistible.

It would be well that the deckhouses on board ocean liners should be so arranged as to afford to the officers of the watch, both by day and by night, a clear and unimpeded view of every part of the deck, so that no one could fall or be thrown overboard without immediately attracting attention.

The most notable disappearances which bear analogy to that of Mr. Loomis that have come under my notice did not occur on crowded ships, but on liners where the passengers were few and on steam yachts. The most mysterious case of all is probably that of the Landgrave William of Hesse, whose brother married Princess Marguerite of Prussia, youngest sister of the kaiser. The Landgrave William, who was a royal prince, nephew of the King and Queen of Denmark and a first cousin of Queen Alexandra of England, disappeared on the night of October 14, 1888, while on his way from Batavia to Singapore. He was in a voyage round the world at the time, accompanied by several officers, a physician and a large suite of servants. While at Batavia, where he was received with all royal honors, he suffered from a slight sunstroke, which did not, however, result in any symptoms of aberration of the mind. In fact, he seemed perfectly well when he sailed from Batavia.

On the evening of October 14 he retire to his cabin after dinner, promising to join the members of his suite, a few minutes later, on deck. On his failure to reappear on of the officers went in search of him, but found the cabin empty. He immediately alarmed the other officers as well as the captain of the vessel. A general search was instituted, which, however, proved fruitless. No trace of him could be found. As nobody had seen him on deck after his withdrawal to his cabin, the supposition is that, during a moment of sudden and temporary insanity, he must have worked his way through the porthole and have thrown himself into the sea, though the porthole was by no means a large one, and it is difficult to conceive how he could have got through it and dropped into the water unnoticed.

Equally mysterious was the disappearance at sea, in almost the same latitude, of Lady Brassey, on September 14, 1887, that is to say, about a year previously. She had been visiting India with her husband. Lord Brassey, and was traveling on board her well known yacht, the Sunbeam, from Bombay to Melbourne. Her children were on board, and inasmuch as both they and her husband were devoted to her, and her life had been a singularly happy one, there was no reason whatsoever why she should have taken her life. Yet one evening, when the maid tapped at the door of her cabin to help her dress for dinner, she found the apartment empty, and as dinner was announced before Lady Brassey appeared, she informed Lord Brassey. The last named, who, like his daughters, had been under the impression that Lady Brassey had been resting in her cabin, at once became alarmed and instituted a search, which failed to bring to light any trace of the unfortunate woman. The Sunbeam remained cruising about in the vicinity in the hope of recovering at least the body, but it was a vain hope at the best, since the seas in those latitudes are infested with sharks.

Did Lady Brassey fall overboard or throw herself into the sea voluntarily? No one knows to this day. Her end has always been shrouded in mystery, and I doubt whether any one of those in this country who peruse the pages of that singularly charming book entitled "The Voyage of the Sunbeam," which is to be found in every American library, public as well as private, is aware of the strange fate of its gifted author.

The elder brother of the present Earl of Aberdeen furnishes another instance of these unaccountable and unexplained disappearances at sea. While on a voyage from Boston to Melbourne by sailing ship, in 1870, he vanished in the course of the trip, somewhere off the coast of South America. No one saw him fall or throw himself overboard, but one day he was missing, that was all. To add to the mystery by reason of a romantic adventure he was sailing under an assumed name, and nobody on board the ship was aware of his rank and title. Consequently all sorts of complications ensued, and several years elapsed before his next surviving brother, the present Lord Aberdeen, was able to establish his claim to the earldom, to the other peerages and to the extensive estates in Scotland and in England. Even to this day Lord Aberdeen is constantly being menaced with suits from men who allege that they are his missing elder brother, and who put forward claims to his peerages and to his estates.

Some 10 or 12 years ago a well known New York banker, Adolph Ladenburg, disappeared from on board ship while on a trip from the West Indies to New York, and, although rumors have been circulated from time to time that he is still alive, yet they have proved to be without foundation. When past experiences are considered, it is doubtful if anything will ever be heard again of Mr. Loomis, at any rate as living, and his name will probably have to be added to the list of mysterious disappearances at sea.

Of course, in such cases as his a certain amount of unpleasant notoriety attaches itself to those who, either by chance or by design, have been the associates of the missing or dead man on shipboard, and Mr. Ellis, the promoter, who was crossing the ocean with Loomis, would have acted more satisfactorily had he either remained in Paris or returned to this country pending the attempts to clear up the mystery, instead of possessing himself of the official document which Loomis was charged with conveying to Emperor Menelik of Abyssinia, and which, in the hands of Ellis, is naturally of immense value to his financial schemes in Abyssinia, endowing him with a species of official prestige which he would not have otherwise enjoyed.

His position in the affair is as unsatisfactory as that of ex-Major Helbert, who was the associate of Cecil Murray when the latter was found dead in his cabin on board a trans-Atlantic liner at sea, poisoned by cyanide of potassium. The bottle cantaining the latter did not belong to Murray, who was found to have left a will, made on shipboard, bequeathing all his money, a very large sum, to Helbert, who was a mere acquaintance. The will was disputed, but settled out of court by means of a compromise. Today the ex-major is serving a sentence in an English penitentiary for theft.—New York Tribune.

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